

43 Reported speech

The words that people say are called direct speech. Reported speech is often used to describe what someone said at an earlier point in time.

See also:

Present simple **1** Past simple **7**

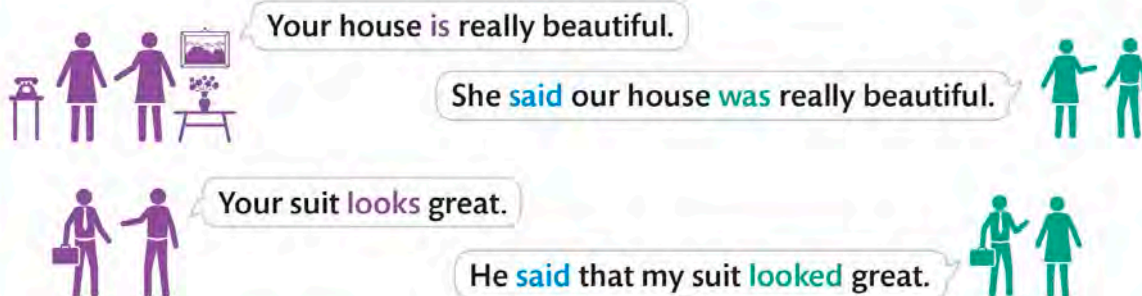
Types of verbs **49**

43.1 REPORTED SPEECH

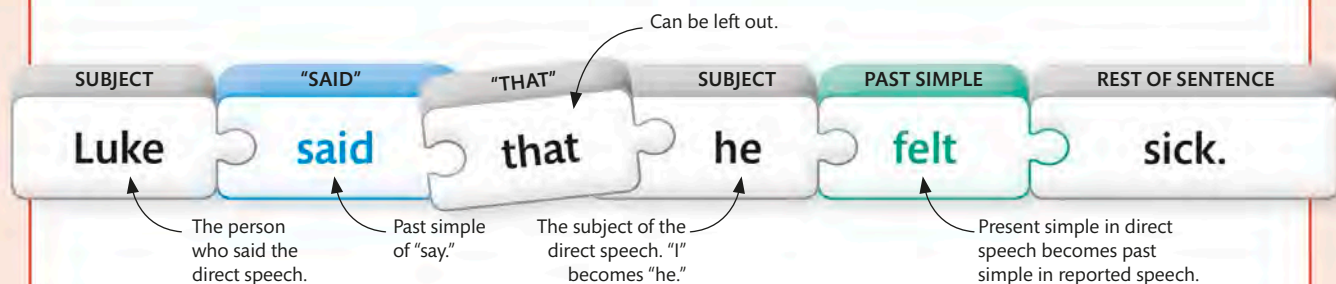
The main verb in reported speech is usually "said."
The reported verb is usually in a different tense from the direct speech.



FURTHER EXAMPLES



HOW TO FORM



43.2 "TELL" IN REPORTED SPEECH

In reported speech, "tell" can also be used as the main verb. It must be followed by an object, which shows who someone is talking to.

I **want** to learn to drive.



He { **said**
told me } that he **wanted** to learn to drive.

"Say" does not need to be followed by an object.

"Tell" must be followed by an object.



FURTHER EXAMPLES



She **told me** that she **was** at the party.



She **told me** that she **had** a very stressful job.



He **told us** he **arrived** late to the meeting.



They **told us** they **bought** a new house.



I **told her** that I **went** abroad last year.

"That" can also be left out in reported speech with "told."



We **told them** that we **didn't** want it.

⚠ COMMON MISTAKES "SAY" AND "TELL" IN REPORTED SPEECH

He **said** that he had a fast car. ✓

He **said me** that he had a fast car. ✗

"Said" cannot have an object.

He **told me** that he had a fast car. ✓

He **told** that he had a fast car. ✗

"Told" must have an object.

44 Tenses in reported speech

In reported speech, the reported verb usually “goes back” a tense. Time and place references and pronouns sometimes also change.

See also:

Present continuous 4 Past continuous 10

Past perfect simple 13 Modal verbs 56

44.1 REPORTED SPEECH IN DIFFERENT TENSES

The tense used in reported speech is usually one tense back in time from the tense in direct speech.

I'm working in New York.



She said **she was working** in New York.

PRESENT CONTINUOUS



PAST CONTINUOUS

I've been to China twice.



He said that **he'd been** to China twice.

PRESENT PERFECT



PAST PERFECT

I will call you soon.



He said **he would call** them soon.

FUTURE WITH "WILL"



MODAL VERB "WOULD"

We can speak Japanese.



They said that **they could speak** Japanese.

MODAL VERB "CAN"



MODAL VERB "COULD"

44.2 REPORTED SPEECH AND THE PAST SIMPLE

The past simple in direct speech can either stay as the past simple or change to the past perfect in reported speech. The meaning is the same.

I **arrived** in Delhi on Saturday.

DIRECT SPEECH
WITH PAST SIMPLE

He said { **he arrived**
he'd arrived } in Delhi on Saturday.

REPORTED SPEECH WITH
PAST SIMPLE OR PAST PERFECT

44.3 REPORTED SPEECH WITHOUT CHANGE OF TENSE

If the situation described is ongoing, the verb does not have to change tense in reported speech.



I **like** eating cake.

Amelia said that she **likes** eating cake.

Amelia still likes eating cake.



FURTHER EXAMPLES



Your hat **looks** great.

He said that my hat **looks** great.



I **love** your tie.

He said that he **loves** my tie.



44.4 TIME AND PLACE REFERENCES

If speech is reported some time after it was said, words used to talk about times and places may need to change.

The time reference is "yesterday" in direct speech.

I went to work **yesterday**.



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APRIL
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She said she'd been to work **the day before**.

The time reference is "the day before" in reported speech.



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FURTHER EXAMPLES



I'll call you **tomorrow**.



He said he'd call me **the following day**.



The weather is nice **here**.



She told me the weather was nice **there**.



We'll have a party **this weekend**.



They said they'd have a party **that weekend**.



I saw you **last week**.



She said she'd seen me **the week before**.



I'm starting a new job **today**.



You told her you were starting a new job **that day**.

44.5 OTHER CHANGES IN REPORTED SPEECH

In reported speech, pronouns may also need to be changed to ensure they refer to the correct person or thing.



I don't believe **these** ghost stories.

He said that he didn't believe **those** ghost stories.

"These" is replaced by the more distant "those."



This house gives me the creeps.

He said that **that** house gave him the creeps.

"This" is replaced by the more distant "that."



FURTHER EXAMPLES



I don't like **my** new haircut.

He said that he didn't like **his** new haircut.



I can't wait to move into **our** new house.

He said that he couldn't wait to move into **their** new house.



Are you going to come with **us**?

He asked if I was going to go with **them**.



These are the best pastries I've ever tasted.

She said **they** were the best pastries she'd ever tasted.



45 Reporting verbs

In reported speech, "said" can be replaced with a wide variety of verbs that give people more information about how someone said something.

See also:

Present simple 1 Past simple 7

Types of verbs 49

45.1 REPORTING VERBS WITH "THAT"

"Say" and "tell" do not give any information about the speaker's manner. They can be replaced with other verbs that suggest the speaker's mood or reason for speaking.



I'm not very good at golf.

Neil **admitted that** he wasn't very good at golf.

Shows unwillingness on the part of the speaker.



FURTHER EXAMPLES



Don't be afraid of the dog. He's just excited to see you.

They **explained that** the dog was barking because he was excited to see me.



Your house is beautiful. It has a nice lawn, too.

Rohit admired our house, and **added that** it had a nice lawn.



HOW TO FORM

SUBJECT

REPORTING VERB (PAST TENSE)

"THAT"

PAST TENSE

Neil

admitted

that

he wasn't very good at golf.

Verb introduces reported speech and gives more information about it.

Verb is followed by "that."

Reported speech changes tense as usual.

45.2 REPORTING VERBS WITH OBJECT AND INFINITIVE

Some reporting verbs are followed by an object and an infinitive. English often uses these verbs to report orders, advice, and instructions.



Remember to buy some milk tonight.

Ellie **reminded** **me** **to buy** some milk tonight.

Reporting verb

Object

Infinitive



FURTHER EXAMPLES

You've been very naughty! Go to your room.



I just **ordered** **Aaron** **to go** to his room.



Could you please give me a ride to the station?



Sorry I'm late. Lucia **asked** **me** **to give** her a ride to the station.



Come to the party! You'll have a great time!



We **encouraged** **Gareth** **to come** to the party. I hope he turns up.



HOW TO FORM

SUBJECT

REPORTING VERB (PAST TENSE)

OBJECT

INFINITIVE

REST OF SENTENCE

Ellie

reminded

me

to buy

some milk.

The object shows who was being spoken to.

The infinitive usually expresses an order, instruction, or piece of advice.

46 Reported speech with negatives

Negatives in reported speech are formed in the same way as negatives in direct speech. "Not" is used with the auxiliary, or with the main verb if there is no auxiliary.

See also:

Present simple negative 2

Past simple negative 8 Types of verbs 49

46.1 REPORTING NEGATIVE AUXILIARIES

When the direct speech is negative using "do not," "is not," and "has not," "do," "is," or "has" changes tense, rather than the main verb.



I **don't** work on weekends.

Present simple negative.

He said he **didn't** work on weekends.

Past simple negative.



FURTHER EXAMPLES



I **don't** want to drive. I'd rather walk.

Sue said she **didn't** want to drive. She'd rather walk.



The car **isn't** starting.

They told me the car **wasn't** starting.



They **haven't** arrived on time because of the car.

Fay said they **hadn't** arrived on time because of the car.



46.2 REPORTING OTHER VERBS WITH NEGATIVES

If a reporting verb is followed by an object and an infinitive, "not" goes between the object and the infinitive to form the negative.



You shouldn't sign the contract.

Our lawyer **advised** me **not** to sign the contract.



"Not" makes the reported speech negative.

FURTHER EXAMPLES



Don't eat any more cake. It's bad for you.

I think I **persuaded** Evan **not** to eat any more cake.



Don't go in the water. It's dangerous.

The lifeguard **warned** me **not** to go in the water.



I don't think you should stand so near the edge.

My friend **warned** me **not** to stand near the edge.



You must not lose your passport while you're away.

My dad **reminded** me **not** to lose my passport.



Don't draw on the walls!

My dad **told** me **not** to draw on the walls.



47 Reported questions

Reported questions are used to describe questions that someone has asked. Direct questions and reported questions use different word orders.

See also:

Forming questions 34

Open questions 36 Types of verbs 49

47.1 REPORTED OPEN QUESTIONS

Direct open questions are reported by swapping the order of the subject and the verb.



Where are my keys?



Adam asked me where his keys were. Have you seen them?

The subject comes before the verb in reported questions.

The tense in reported questions usually moves one tense back from the tense in direct questions.

FURTHER EXAMPLES



Why can't you come to the party?

He asked me why I couldn't come to the party.

An object can be included to say who was asked the original question.



When will they arrive?

She asked when they would arrive.

The object of the reporting verb can be left out.



HOW TO FORM



The main verb in reported questions is usually "ask."

The object can be left out.

The subject comes before the verb in reported questions.

The tense moves one tense back from direct speech.

47.2 REPORTING QUESTIONS WITH "DO"

When a direct question uses the verb "do," this is left out of reported questions.



Let's bake a cake. What **do** we **need**?

He asked me what we **needed**.

Reported questions leave out the auxiliary verb "do."

The past form of the verb is usually used.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

Why **do** you **want** to work for us?



They asked me why I **wanted** to work for them.



What **do** you **think**?



He asked me what I **thought**.

What **does** a florist **do**?



James asked me what a florist **does**.

The tense doesn't always change.

Where **do** Jay and Seb **live**?



Paul asked me where Jay and Seb **live**.

Who **do** you **know** at work?



She asked me who I **knew** at work.

What **do** you usually **knit**?



He asked me what I usually **knit**.

! COMMON MISTAKES WORD ORDER IN REPORTED QUESTIONS

It is incorrect to swap the verb and object in reported questions.

He asked me where **the station is**. ✓

He asked me where **is the station**. ✗

47.3 REPORTED CLOSED QUESTIONS

If the answer to a question in direct speech is "yes" or "no," "if" or "whether" is used to report the question. "Whether" is more formal than "if."



Direct question.

Are you meeting your sales targets?

My boss asked me if I was meeting my sales targets.



Reported question uses "if" or "whether."

FURTHER EXAMPLES



Will you be at the meeting on Monday?

Kara asked whether I would be at the meeting on Monday.



In reported questions with "if" and "whether," the object after "asked" can be left out.



Do you want to stay for dinner?

Ian asked me if we wanted to stay for dinner.



Reported questions with "if" and "whether" leave out the auxiliary verb "do."

HOW TO FORM



The object can be left out.

"If" and "whether" mean the same thing, but "whether" is more formal.

47.4 REPORTING QUESTIONS WITH "OR"

"If" or "whether" can also be used to report questions that use "or" in direct speech.



Does **Jo** want tea **or** coffee?



Jo, Tom asked me **if you** wanted tea **or** coffee.

The verb changes tense.

FURTHER EXAMPLES



Do **you** want to go by car **or** by train?



He asked **whether we** wanted to go by car **or** by train.



Do **you** prefer wine **or** champagne?



Jo asked **me if I** preferred wine **or** champagne.



Did **you** choose to ski **or** snowboard?



He asked **whether I** chose to ski **or** snowboard.



Did **you** decide to walk **or** run?

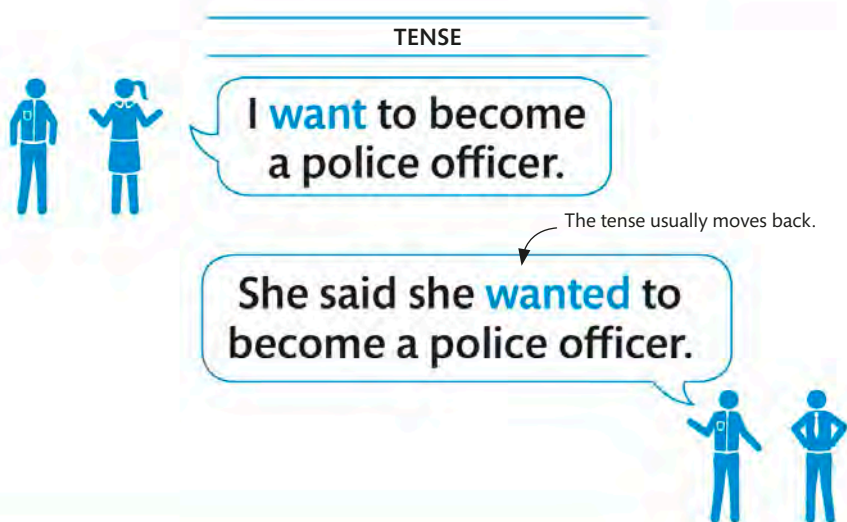


Harry asked **if I** decided to walk **or** run.

48 Reported speech overview

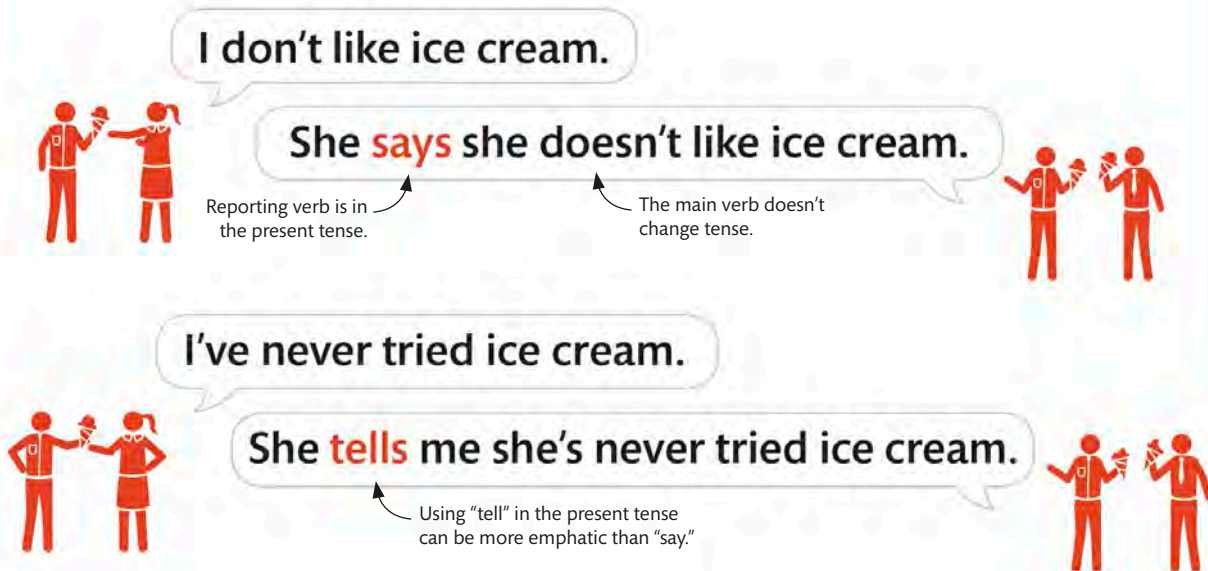
48.1 CHANGING REFERENCES IN REPORTED SPEECH

Certain words have variable reference, which means their meaning is context-dependent. In order to retain the meaning of the direct speech, reported speech usually revises tenses, pronouns, and time references.



48.2 REPORTING VERBS IN THE PRESENT TENSE

The reporting verb can be in the present tense. In this case, the tense of the sentence doesn't change.



When forming reported speech from direct speech, some words change in order to keep the meaning consistent. Other words stay the same.

See also:

Present simple **1** Past simple **7** Tenses in reported speech **44** Modal verbs **56** Personal pronouns **77**

PRONOUNS



I did well in **my** exams.

She said she did well in **her** exams.

"My" changes to "her" to refer back to the first speaker.



TIME REFERENCES



I'll apply for the job **tomorrow**.

She said she'd apply for the job **the next day**.

"Tomorrow" changes to "the next day" to keep the meaning the same.



48.3 REPORTING MODAL VERBS

Most modal verbs, except for "will" and "can," behave differently from other verbs. No matter what the tense of the direct speech, they don't change in reported speech.

I **might** buy some ice cream.



She said she **might** buy some ice cream.

The modal verb is the same as in direct speech.



I **could** have bought one.



She said she **could** have bought one.

The reported verb also doesn't change from direct speech.

